HORACE

EPISTLES
BOOK II

AND

EPISTLE TO THE PISONES
('ARS POETICA')

EDITED BY

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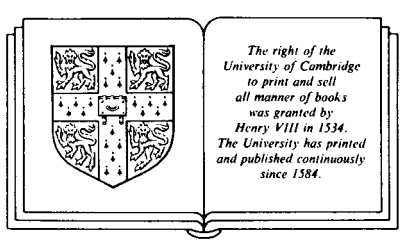

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INTRODUCTION

1. THE EPISTLE TO AUGUSTUS (*EPISTLES* 2.1)

One day Horace received a letter from the Emperor which contained the following reproach: *irasci me tibi scito, quod non in plerisque eius modi scriptis mecum potissimum loquaris; an uereris ne apud posteros infame tibi sit quod uidearis familiaris nobis esse?* 'I want you to know I'm cross with you for not talking to me rather than others in your numerous writings of that kind; are you afraid that if you are seen to be a friend of mine it will blight your reputation with posterity?' Suetonius, who presumably found a copy of the letter in the palace archives, introduces the quotation by saying *post sermones uero quosdam lectos nullam sui mentionem habitam ita sit questus* (*Life of Horace*, Loeb edn II 486–8), 'After reading some of the *sermones* he complained that he had not been mentioned.' No weight need be attached to Suetonius' *mentionem*; it was address that Augustus wanted, not just mention. The phrase *quosdam sermones* is vague. It could refer to any of the *Epistles* (though probably not the *Ars Poetica*); it might even include some of the *Satires*, since none of those, either, had been addressed to Augustus. *post . . . lectos* would refer most naturally to a first reading; but that is not necessary, and other factors tell against it. Augustus could easily have read *E.* 1 and *E.* 2.2 before the end of 19 B.C. But to judge from the sequence in Suetonius' chapter, the complaint came later than the *CS* and *C.* 4. So if we take the usual view that *C.* 4 was finished in the summer of 13 B.C. after Augustus' return from Gaul, we may suppose as a working hypothesis that the Emperor's complaint came in the early autumn. Perhaps after congratulating the poet on *C.* 4, the letter said something like 'When are we to have the pleasure of seeing more of your *sermones*? I was reading some of them last week and realised that it's six years since you gave us your last collection. And, talking of your *sermones*, I want you to know I'm cross with you, etc.' Leaving a reasonable interval for laziness and creativity, we might then date Horace's reply, viz. *E.* 2.1, to the early part of 12 B.C. Such a date would take account of the altars set up in 12 B.C. for the new cult of

the *Lares* and the *Genius Augusti* at the *compita* (16);[1] of Horace's resumption of lyric writing in *C.* 4 (112–13); and of the Alpine victories of Tiberius and Drusus in 15 B.C. (252–3). For the general chronological sweep of the epistle see below p. 10.

In considering the different things, favourable and otherwise, which were said about Augustus, one has to bear in mind the speaker's background. A member of the old senatorial order could point to Augustus' complicity in the murder of Cicero, his savage vengeance on Perusia, and, later, his harsh treatment of the two Julias and his relegation of Ovid; beyond such details lay the undoubted fact that Caesar's heir had finally destroyed the old republic. A member of the equestrian order, however, might dwell on Augustus' refusal to carry out another purge after his return from Egypt in 29 B.C., his ability to inspire loyalty in two such different men as Maecenas and Agrippa, and his wise promotion of new administrative and artistic talent; beyond all that lay the equally undoubted fact that after seventy-odd years of intermittent civil war the Princeps had brought peace and order, and had fostered the recovery of civilised life. Such contradictory views were inevitable in the case of a man who wielded such vast power for over half a century. At this remove in time, however, it is surely evident that for all his ruthlessness and lack of charm he was the only man who could, in Syme's words, have 'saved and regenerated the Roman people'.[2]

As for Horace, he had been born in 65 B.C., just two years before Octavian (the future Augustus); he had fought against him at Philippi in 42 B.C.; returned to Rome under an amnesty; obtained a secretaryship in the treasury; and with the help of Virgil and Varius had attracted the attention of Maecenas. By accepting Maecenas' offer of patronage in early 37 B.C., Horace took the first step towards association with Octavian's party. Yet he did not attack Antony and his followers, nor did he pay any attention (deferential or otherwise) to

[1] See Taylor 185, 191.

[2] These are the closing words of Syme's *The Roman revolution*, a seminal work which is far from complimentary to Augustus. Jones supplies a compact and judicious survey. In addition to some good photographs there is much of value in Earl. A fascinating account of Augustus' influence on English literature is given by Erskine-Hill. For a very different view of the question see the lively and learned study by Weinbrot.

Octavian until the time of Actium, when he mentioned him in *I.* 1 and 9 and in *S.* 2.1, 5 and 6. Those poems were published in 30 B.C. In the next seven years Augustus came to occupy a more significant place in Horace's poetry. He is mentioned in nearly one in five of the odes in Books 1–3, and plays a prominent part in 1.2, 1.12, 1.37, 3.4, and 3.25. But before talking too readily of adulation we must remember what Augustus had achieved, and what he meant to the vast majority of Roman citizens who did not belong to senatorial families. Again, Horace himself had been treated with consideration during his period of political disenchantment, and by now he had come to believe that any hope of recovery rested with Augustus. Finally, those laudatory passages in the *Odes* have to be assessed in terms of ancient panegyric. When compared with the *Panegyricus Messallae* or the *Laus Pisonis*,[3] or with later effusions like Statius' poem on the equestrian statue of Domitian (*Silu.* 1.1), Horace's tributes seem quite restrained.

As well as profiting from Horace's skill as a *uates*, Augustus would have liked to employ him on a more personal basis, perhaps because of his experience in the civil service. In a letter to Maecenas (about 25 B.C.?) he said 'As I am over-worked and unwell I would like to deprive you of our friend Horace. So he will give up sponging at your table and come here to my royal table to help me with my correspondence' (Suet. *Life of Horace*). It was a unique opportunity for power and enrichment which most people would have seized with alacrity. But not Horace. He remembered that his health was very uncertain, and politely declined. To his credit, Augustus, who was not used to being turned down, acquiesced. He even wrote inviting Horace to use the official residence as his own – 'if his health permitted'. This does not mean, of course, that Horace enjoyed or sought a position of social equality. One cannot imagine him replying in kind when the Emperor called him 'an unsullied cock' or 'a delightful mannikin' (Suet. *Life of Horace*). Nor did he venture to address him in any of his *Epistles*. As we have seen, Augustus was slightly piqued at this and made the protest discussed above. That could not be ignored, and so the *Epistle to Augustus* was duly written.

The main problem was one of tone. The recipient of a Horatian

[3] For the *Panegyricus Messallae* see Tibullus, Loeb edn, 306–22; for the *Laus Pisonis* see *Minor Latin poets*, Loeb edn, 294–314.

epistle was not usually accorded any superior status; he was expected to listen politely to what the poet had to say; and sometimes he was chided for his moral shortcomings. That would hardly do for Augustus. Yet a protracted eulogy would be equally out of place. What Horace did was to write a general essay of some 200 lines on the one subject which bound them together, viz. poetry and its role in the state. To this he added a formal preface (1–17) and a longer, more relaxed, conclusion (214–70), in both of which he addressed the Emperor directly.

The essay begins with a complaint about the conservatism of contemporary taste. This may cause surprise, for there is a tendency to think that as a 'classical poet' Horace was at ease in his environment and happily in tune with the reading public. That is a misconception. In his day Horace was a modern poet and had in large part to create his own audience. In satire he found himself at odds with the admirers of Lucilius (*S.* 1.10), and his highly original *Odes* never had a popular appeal. Even among the educated, who might have been expected to appreciate what he had done, his recognition was delayed by class prejudice – he was a freedman's son (*S.* 1.6.6, 45, 46; *E.* 1.20.20). This lack of rapport with many of the middle-aged and elderly helps to explain his address *uirginibus puerisque* in *C.* 3.1.4 and his delight at being acknowledged by young people (*C.* 4.3.13–16).

The style of this protest (18-92) is continuously lively. Greeks and Romans are weighed in a balance; allegedly corresponding literary periods are contrasted like olives and nuts; an imagined contest in painting, music, and wrestling takes place between the Romans and 'the oily Achaeans'; do poems, we are asked, improve with age like wine? Then there are several lines of Socratic debate, ending in the collapse of the critic who 'relies on the calendar, using age as a measure of quality and spurning whatever has not been hallowed by Our Lady of Funerals'. The arguments are sharp and cogent: too schematic a parallel with Greece leads to absurdities; just because Ennius is the father of Latin poetry that does not mean he is comparable to Homer. (Actually Homer was not, strictly speaking, the first Greek poet; he came at the end of a long oral tradition. But the Romans knew little about that.) How can one distinguish between 'old and admirable' and 'new and detestable'? In what year or month should the line be drawn? The truth is that older people condemn what they themselves don't like; they're ashamed to heed their juniors or admit

that what they were taught as youngsters ought to be done away with. Finally, a quite unanswerable argument: if the Greeks had been so hostile to novelty, what would now be old?

Though satirical, the tone remains reasonable: sometimes the public is right, sometimes wrong (63–4); I'm not *attacking* the work of Livius Andronicus or campaigning for its abolition; I'm only asking for some critical discrimination (69–70). Once or twice, it is true, the exaggeration draws close to fantasy. To claim, for instance, that some people regarded as canonical the treaties made by the Roman kings with Gabii or the Sabines is like contending that in the opinion of some people today no historian has managed to improve on the Domesday Book. It is also going too far to pretend that Naevius was still in wide circulation and was thought of as 'almost recent'. Nevertheless, allowing for some amusing hyperbole, Horace's picture was basically true. The writers to whom he refers (Ennius, Pacuvius, and Accius; Plautus and Terence) were cited again and again by Cicero in the previous generation; the aged and influential Varro, to whom such authors were not 'archaic', was only fifteen years dead; no doubt in conservative circles they were still admired.

The epistle then continues with two brief but not unfriendly caricatures. After the Persian wars the Greeks delighted in novelty to the point of childishness (93–102). Here we are still in touch with Greek novelty as described at the end of the last section, but the emphasis has shifted to frivolity, which provides a contrast to early Roman earnestness: nothing mattered in those days except law and business (103–7). But now all that has changed; the Romans have taken to composing verse as a dinner-time amusement (108–17). Such an activity, however amateur, is not all bad: writing keeps a man out of mischief. Also (and now the tone becomes more serious and some of Horace's own interests come to the fore) the poet educates children; he promotes moral awareness by praising good deeds; he comforts the unfortunate and supplies the words for public prayers (as in the *CS*). The poet has therefore a unique and valuable place in the life of the community (118–38). It is worth remembering here that the Romans had an oral educational system. They recited poetry and composed speeches instead of writing essays. At present 'rote learning' is much despised; but the Roman practice does not sound strange to those who learned Macaulay's *Horatius* before they were in their teens.

The sturdy Italian farmers of old had their ceremonies (a link with

the prayers in the last paragraph). But their jesting became crude and aggressive and had to be restrained by law.[4] Art came with the conquest of Greece; for epic, the hexameter superseded the old Italian Saturnian used by Naevius, and Roman writers began to imitate Greek tragedy, though with insufficient attention to polish (139–67). This takes us back to the stage, but the emphasis now is on clumsiness of composition. Comedy, we are told, is stylistically exacting – a fact ignored by Plautus, who cared only about his fee (168–76). Here Plautus the playwright is cleverly described in terms of Plautus the actor: he goes charging slipshod across the stage and doesn't care if the play falls flat on its face. Another factor discouraging style is the playwright's heavy dependence on the goodwill of the audience (177–207). In the middle of a performance the groundlings may call for a boxing match, as they did in the days of Terence. Even the better sort are entirely engrossed with vulgar pageants. This is another exaggeration, for we were informed earlier on that the *palliata* (i.e. Roman comedies in Greek costume and setting) regularly filled the theatre (60–1). But consistency is of little importance compared with the vividness of Horace's description:

> The curtain is up for four-hour periods, if not longer,
> as squadrons of cavalry and hordes of infantry hurtle past;
> fallen kings are dragged across with their hands pinioned;
> chariots, carriages, wagons, and ships rumble along,
> carrying works of bronze and ivory taken from Corinth.

Later the much-bejewelled performer makes his entrance:

He walks on stage and at once is greeted with frenzied applause.
'Has he said something already?'
'No.'
'Then why are they clapping?'
'It's his woollen coat, dyed in Tarentum to rival a violet.'

The pop artist and his audience go back a long way. Then, in words which recall the end of the previous section (166–7), Horace makes it clear that his scorn is not directed at the legitimate theatre: the great tragedian who plays on his emotions, carrying him away to Thebes or

[4] This passage is included in the discussion of drama in the essay on the *AP*.

Athens, is like a magician (208–13). Those lines, which are seldom noticed, are interesting for two reasons: first, they show Horace as a sympathetic theatre-goer willingly suspending disbelief; and secondly they prove once again that tragedies were still performed. Horace is not talking as a reader, for the *lector* comes in by way of contrast in the following line.

Beginning the final section (214ff.), and addressing Augustus directly, Horace says 'Spare a thought for the poet who relies on the reader rather than on the spectator.' This returns us once more to non-dramatic poetry, poetry written in the high style suitable for honouring the Emperor.

Looking back over the literary discourse one notices that when it speaks of specific genres it mentions tragedy, comedy, epic, and choral lyric, but not love elegy. One view, advanced in recent years by Syme,[5] is that by omitting love elegy Horace is issuing a sort of covert manifesto against the whole genre represented by Gallus, Propertius, Tibullus, and Ovid. That may well oversimplify the matter. More than one sort of modern writing could find shelter under the umbrella extended in the first 100 lines or so of *E.* 2.1. Catullus, for instance, would not have quarrelled with the stylistic complaints about Naevius and Ennius. When Horace says

> indignor quicquam reprehendi, non quia crasse
> compositum illepideue putetur sed quia nuper (76–7)
>
> It makes me annoyed that a thing should be faulted, not for being crudely or clumsily made but simply for being recent,

he is using terms which would have been quite acceptable to anyone writing in the Alexandrian tradition. And when he goes on to make fun of amateur, dinner-table, poets (109–10) he is certainly not directing his wit at the highly professional love elegists. Another point to bear in mind is that when specific genres are mentioned nothing is said of the informal, personal type of lyric associated with Horace himself. So the explanation of these omissions should be sought mainly in the area of decorum. It may be true that, although there are elegiac

[5] Syme (3) 177ff. and (5) 359. The case is rather different with the *AP*, which is not addressed to Augustus. See below, p. 33.

themes in the *Epodes* and *Odes*, Horace on the whole found the ethos of love elegy, with its rather narrow obsessions, unappealing. (One may think of his silence regarding Gallus and Propertius, and of the two occasions on which he urged Tibullus (*C.* 1.33) and Valgius (*C.* 2.9) not to give way to self-pity.) But even if he had been more enthusiastic he could hardly have discoursed on the poetry of love and wine, whether lyric or elegiac, to one who was now *circa lustra decem* and who a few years before had made it clear that his regime sternly disapproved of self-indulgence (18 B.C., cf. *moribus ornes* in line 2). The *Epistle to Augustus* was a public poem. Only the major public genres, then, were appropriate to the occasion.

We turn now to what might be termed the courtly framework of the epistle. The opening lines are characteristically beguiling: as Caesar is busy governing Italy, it would be unpatriotic for Horace to detain him with a long discourse (*longo sermone*). We almost forget that Augustus had asked for it (a point which is tactfully ignored), and that in fact *E.* 2.1 is longer than any other epistle except the *Ars Poetica*. It is less easy to come to terms with the next section (5–17), which, after comparing Augustus (to his advantage) to the great culture-heroes of Greece and Rome, reaches a climax of deferential enthusiasm:

> praesenti tibi maturos largimur honores,
> iurandasque tuum per numen ponimus aras,
> nil oriturum alias, nil ortum tale fatentes (15–17)
>
> But *you* are honoured in good time while still among us.
> We build altars on which to swear by your divinity,
> declaring your like has never been and never will be.

Readers raised in Judaeo-Christian monotheism may find this odd or even shocking; but such honours were regularly paid to Hellenistic monarchs on the grounds that a person of superhuman power must necessarily be divine. Since the apotheosis of Julius Caesar, Octavian had been *diui filius*, and it was accepted that he would become a deity himself after his death. In the mean time, while he used the phenomenon of ruler worship very astutely to enhance his power, Augustus tried to impose certain distinctions. In Egypt he was worshipped as a god; in Asia and Bithynia temples were built to him but only in conjunction with *Roma*; in Rome itself Augustus resisted full divine

honours, remembering how Julius Caesar had outraged the nobility by accepting them. Over the years, however, he had sanctioned various other types of tribute, and he had recently agreed that an image of his *genius*, or guardian spirit, should be set up among the *Lares Augusti* (the ancestors of his own house) and worshipped at the revived crossroads ceremonies connected with the dead.[6] The *genius* is what Horace means here by *numen* (16; cf. *C.* 4.5.34–5).

Though for convenience we are treating lines 1–17 separately as an introductory address, they are carefully woven into the fabric of the poem. Not only are Greek and early Roman figures brought in for comparison, as they are later on, but the flattery of Augustus turns out to be connected with the subsequent critique of the public's taste. Although Horace's way of putting it is altogether more tactful, the essence of his contention is 'since the superiority of your political genius is acknowledged today, in your lifetime, the same should be true of our poetic genius'. If we are right about this, the Emperor is not just being flattered or educated; he is being used.

The closing part of the courtly framework is much longer (214–70). It grows out of the previous section, for as playwrights depend on an audience (177–81), poets are dependent on their readers. Such poets merit Augustus' attention. Why? Because if he neglects them his great library in the temple of Palatine Apollo will remain unfilled. Thus the Emperor is being reminded of a standard which he himself has set. Moreover, that earlier act of munificence is not complete; it represents a continuing obligation.

The climax which lies ahead is a more emphatic assertion of the value of poets to what we would call the imperial propaganda. But Horace prepares for that climax by first diminishing himself and his fellow-writers for non-poetic reasons: they are tactless, thin-skinned, easily depressed, and over-optimistic. Then, in another Greek/Roman comparison, he adds some amusing lines on Alexander the Great, praising his artistic, but not his poetic, taste (he paid good money to the wretched Choerilus).[7] Augustus' literary taste has been vindicated by the praises of Virgil and Varius. Horace's own tribute, already

[6] See Taylor, chapters 6 and 7.

[7] Horace here is manipulating the story. Because Alexander gave Choerilus a gold coin for every good line, Horace alleges that he had no taste in poetry. But ps.-Acro says Choerilus received only seven coins in all.

paid in the *Odes* (especially *C.* 4.5 and 15), is ignored. Instead, he wishes he could rise to an epic

> Rather than writing talks
> that creep on the ground, I'd sooner celebrate mighty deeds,
> describing the lie of the land, the course of rivers, the setting
> of forts on mountain summits, barbarous kingdoms, and then
> the ending of strife throughout the world by your command,
> Janus guardian of peace locked behind his bars,
> and the Parthian overawed by your imperial might –
> if only my powers matched my yearning.

There, with a hint of irony (for such grandeur is not for him), Horace respectfully imitates the style which he is declining. The lines reinforce the framework of the poem in two ways. First, *sermones*, 'talks', glances back to *sermone* (4). Secondly, the list of the Emperor's achievements recalls those mentioned in 1–3. Taken together, the lists range over many years, summarising the blessings of the *pax Augusta*. Thus, leaving aside the slightly earlier reference to Palatine Apollo which was dedicated in 28 B.C. (216), we have the closure of the temple of Janus in 29 and 25 or 24 (255),[8] the recapture of the standards from Parthia in 20 (256), the *leges Iuliae* of 18 (2–3), the victories of Tiberius and Drusus in 15 (252–3), and the revival of the *Compitalia* in 12 (16).

The lines quoted above represent the higher end of the *sermo*'s stylistic register; but it was not Horace's practice to finish at that level. So after the climax comes a diminuendo, satirising by contrast the work of *incompetent* eulogists. To avoid embarrassing Augustus, Horace imagines himself as the unfortunate recipient of such a poem – a poem

[8] For the dating of these closures see Syme (3) 25. He puts the third closure in 8 or 7 B.C. Horace gives a similar list of events, with a similar purpose, in *C.* 4.15.4–16. Neither that list nor the list in *E.* 2.1.251–6 attempts to preserve chronological order; so it is going too far to say that the closure of Janus is brought into relation with the submission of Parthia – a connection which is condemned by Syme as 'totally illicit' (5) 89. Nor is any close link indicated by the syntax – *rettulit . . . et . . . restituit . . . et clausit . . . et iniecit emouitque . . . et reuocauit* in *C.* 4.15; cf. *-que et* in *E.* 2.1.255–6, where each unit illustrates the peace described in 254.

so bad that, instead of immortalising him, it ensures his extinction. Our last glimpse is of the poem, containing the 'corpses' of both its subject and its writer, being carried down to the unsavoury Subura for use as wrapping paper.

The *Epistle to Augustus* was placed first in Book 2 because of its distinguished addressee; it was not the first to be written. Before we consider the earlier *Epistle to Florus*, it may be useful to glance back and remind ourselves of where Horace found the idea of the verse epistle and how he developed it. The earliest examples known are the epistles in amusing verses, *uersiculis facetis* (or *factis*?), which Sp. Mummius sent to his friends from Corinth in 146 B.C. (Cic. *Att.* 13.6.4). There must have been many such pieces in the decades which followed; for Lucilius, writing between 130 and 100 B.C., used the *epistula non magna* as an instance of a *poiema* (a short poem or a section of a long one) as distinct from a *poiesis* (a long work seen as a whole) (*ROL* III 404–6). Lucilius probably included several epistles in his *saturae*; fragments of one have survived in which he remonstrates with a friend for not coming to visit him when he was sick (*ROL* III 186–93). Horace did not follow this practice. Instead, he distinguished the two sub-forms, excluding epistles from his two books of satires, and writing only epistles when he returned to hexameter poetry after 23 B.C. According to the scholiasts in their introductions to *S.* 1, he entitled the satires *Sermones* ('Talks') and the epistles *Epistulae*.[9] This points to the distinction noted by ps.-Acro in his introductory note to *E.* 1.1, namely that in the *Epistles* the addressees are thought of as being absent instead of present. Other changes too are observable. The moral emphasis moves from censure to affirmation; while there are still passages of ridicule, Horace offers more discussion and advice; names are much less frequent. Again, since the *Epistles* contain little dialogue, Horace is less concerned to reproduce the effect of fluid debate. So the thought ends more often at the end of a line; elisions are less num-

[9] Horace also used *sermo* (i) in the sense of style (e.g. *S.* 1.10.11), (ii) to refer to what was actually an epistle (*E.* 2.1.4); sometimes, too, *sermones* covers his hexameter poetry as a whole (*E.* 1.4.1, 2.1.250). To avoid confusion, therefore, the satires are here referred to as *Satires* and the epistles as *Epistles*; the term *sermones* is reserved for the hexameters in general.

erous; and the diction is more restrained, with fewer plebeian words, fewer metaphors, and no obscenities.[10]

This rather more formal approach recalls the opinions of the Greek critic Demetrius, who included some remarks on prose letters in his essay *On Style*, a work much indebted to Aristotle. According to Demetrius, a letter should be somewhat more studied than a dialogue 'since the latter represents spontaneous utterance, whereas the former is written out and is sent, so to speak, as a gift' (224). A letter to a friend should be written in a simple, direct style, avoiding abstruse subject-matter (229, 231), and revealing the sender's personality (227). Long, stilted missives are not letters at all, but rather disquisitions with the heading 'Dear So-and-So' (228). It is not certain that Horace could have known Demetrius' work,[11] but clearly *E.* 1 is written from a rather similar point of view. This is less true of *E.* 2, with its two long compositions; and it hardly applies to the *AP*. Unlike a personal letter, the *AP* is concerned with the literary interests of the Pisones mainly as a point of departure; similarly, in *E.* 2.2, Florus as a man is less important than he was in *E.* 1.3; in fact his only function is to complain, and so induce Horace to set down his reasons for not returning to lyric poetry. This does not mean that Florus' complaint should be taken as fiction. Those who make that assumption would have assured us that Augustus' complaint too was a fiction, had that complaint been mentioned by Horace and not by Suetonius.

2. THE EPISTLE TO FLORUS (*EPISTLES* 2.2)

In late 21 or early 20 B.C. Augustus, then on the island of Samos, ordered Tiberius Claudius Nero, the future emperor, to lead an army overland through Macedonia to Armenia, where he was to place Tigranes II on the throne. This task was accomplished in the following May.[12] In the mean time Augustus proceeded east to accept from

[10] For studies of *E.* 1 see Kilpatrick (1), McGann (2), and McLeod.

[11] Demetrius has been dated variously from the 3rd cent. B.C. to the 1st cent. A.D.; see Grube (2) 120–1 and Schenkeveld 135–45. For further comment on Demetrius' work see Grube (1), and Schenkeveld. A compact survey of ancient letter-writing is provided by Ussher (2).

[12] See *CAH* x 260–65.

Phraates of Parthia the standards captured from Crassus at Carrhae in 53 B.C. and from Antony in 40 and 36. Returning to Rome in October 19 B.C., Augustus awarded the *ornamenta praetoria* to Tiberius, who to judge from Dio's phrasing (54.10.4) had returned with him. The present poem therefore falls between the completion of *E.* 1 (late 20 or early 19 B.C.) and the autumn of 19.

On the staff of Tiberius, who was only 23 in 19 B.C., was the young Julius Florus, who was also the recipient of *E.* 1.3. In the earlier poem he is addressed not only as a barrister (23) and legal expert (23–4) but also as a poet. According to Porphyrio on *E.* 1.3.1, Florus wrote satires derived from Ennius, Lucilius, and Varro. To judge from *E.* 1.3.21 (*quae circumuolitas agilis thyma?*) and 24 (*seu condis amabile carmen*) he also wrote pieces in a gentler vein – probably lyrics (cf. *C* 4.2. 27–32). This would lend point to the testimony in *E* 2.2.24–5 that Florus had badgered Horace into promising some odes; and that promise in turn would indicate that after refusing Maecenas' request to resume lyric composition (*E.* 1.1.1–12) Horace was already beginning to relent before Augustus commissioned the *CS*.

In his *Epistles* Horace often reveals at once why he is writing. But not here. Florus, and the reader, have to wait. In the mean time they are asked to imagine a commercial deal. 'Suppose someone offered you a slave, and after commending his virtues added that he had once been caught slacking. In view of the man's candour you wouldn't try to sue him, would you?' Horace cleverly suggests the seller's way of talking: e.g. *extrudere merces*, 'to palm off the goods'; *res urget me nulla*, 'I'm under no pressure to sell'; *meo sum pauper in aere*, 'I'm poor, but not in the red'; *nemo hoc mangonum faceret tibi*, 'none of the dealers would do this for you'; *non temere a me quiuis ferret idem*, 'I wouldn't offer this bargain to everyone'. Then the style takes on a legal flavour; in fact there are a dozen legal phrases between 16 and 25, and the notions of law and property recur throughout the poem (see below).

Finally at 20 Horace comes to the point: 'I told you I was a wretched correspondent, yet you still complain that I haven't written and that I haven't sent you the lyrics which you were expecting.' The tactics are ingenious. Horace presents Florus with a kind of parable (rather like that given by Nathan to David in 2 Samuel 12). As a result, by the time he has reached 25 the aggrieved Florus has been put in the wrong. Nevertheless, although Horace speaks firmly to his

young friend, offering him neither a letter nor a set of lyrics, he does provide something of both, viz. a verse epistle.

Before leaving this section it is worth remarking that when the parable is worked out Horace is seen to correspond to both the seller and the slave. Like the seller, he warned Florus about possible snags in the transaction; but being a singer with a smattering of Greek literature, prone to evade his responsibilities, he also represents the defective merchandise.

In 26 Horace sets off on one of his stories: a soldier in Lucullus' army was robbed of his savings. In anger he led a charge on an enemy position and was handsomely rewarded. Shortly after, the general called on him to lead another attack 'Go, my man, go where your courage summons you.' But the soldier answered 'If you want someone to go . . . go, find a man who has lost his wallet.' Once again, the relevance only gradually becomes apparent. After losing everything at Philippi Horace was aggressive and energetic; now that he has plenty of money he would be mad to write poetry instead of getting a good night's sleep. In this famous passage of autobiography serious and at times tragic recollections are summoned up in a throwaway, almost flippant, style. As schoolboy, student, and soldier Horace seems to have cut an unimpressive figure. Possibly he did, but it is more likely that the middle-aged poet is being rather unfair to his own former self. The humorous self-depreciation is designed to mollify Florus.

It is plain by now that the structure of the epistle is a series of excuses. The third is very brief 'I'm getting old; what would you have me do?' – *quid faciam uis?* (55–7). The desired answer is 'nothing'. Then, taking up *quid faciam uis* in a different sense ('What do you want me to compose?') Horace moves on to another excuse 'I can't satisfy everyone; each friend wants something different' (58–64). The poet sounds like a host trying to cater for a number of demanding guests. The idea of competing demands leads on to the next excuse 'Again, how can I write in Rome, where I'm subjected to so much physical and mental strain (65–86)?' This gives Horace a splendid opportunity for a satirical attack on city life – an attack which clearly appealed to Juvenal. (Compare the chaotic scene in 72–5 with Juv. *Sat.* 3.236–56.)

Another feature of city life (*Romae* in 87 provides the link) is the

mutual congratulation that goes on in poetic cliques. If you write poetry and want your work to be admired you have to attend the recitations of others – a great disincentive, and a further excuse.

This section includes a mock battle in which Horace and an elegist exchange compliments. He calls Horace 'Alcaeus' and in return is dubbed 'Callimachus' or, if that is not thought to be extravagant enough, 'Mimnermus'. Can the elegist be identified? On the one hand, any elegist worth his salt would have treasured comparison with either of the poets mentioned, and no parody of any particular figure can be discerned in the style. On the other hand, Propertius does salute Callimachus in 2.1, 3.1, 3, and 9 (4.1.64, where he actually calls himself 'the Roman Callimachus', is later than the epistle), and elsewhere he claims that in the matter of love a line of Mimnermus is better than the whole of Homer (1.9.11). So if we are asking about Horace's intention, no confident answer can be given; at the same time it would be strange if no Roman readers thought of Propertius. The tone of the exchange (in which Horace, of course, is a participant) is amusingly satirical rather than hostile; but it should be added that the elegist (whoever is meant) can hardly be excluded from the *genus irritabile uatum* (102) – a phrase which Pope sharpened and expanded in characteristic style: 'this jealous, waspish, wrong-head, rhiming Race' (*Imitation* of *E.* 2.2, 148).

The next excuse runs as follows. 'Incompetent poets are pleased with what they write; but to produce a genuine poem is a painful business involving severe self-criticism' (106–40). In an excellent piece of classical theory Horace uses the metaphor of a censor to describe the effort of composing a *legitimum poema*. The censor/poet will remove whatever words are 'insufficiently illustrious', 'lacking in solidity', and 'unworthy of their place of honour', phrases which are all applicable to figures who have disgraced themselves in public life. The censor, however, when revising the rolls, could also admit new names; so the poet too 'will admit new words which have been begotten by father Need'.

Horace continues with the image of a great river, powerful and pure, enriching the soil of Latium. Callimachus had deprecated the use of the great river as a metaphor of true poetry because it carried so much rubbish in its water (*Hymn to Apollo* 108–9). With that in mind Horace himself had compared Lucilius to a muddy river (*S.* 1.4.11).

But now Horace has gone beyond that position and is talking of Latin epic in full knowledge of the *Aeneid*. Sadly Virgil, who was travelling home with Augustus and was therefore probably in the company of Tiberius and Florus, was to die on reaching Italy in September, 19 B.C.

The idea of fertility leads to a third metaphor, drawn this time from the tending of vines or olives: 'the poet will check excessive growth, smooth what is too rough, and take out what is feeble' (122–3).[13] The final metaphor is that of a dancer who can represent the agile and the ponderous with equal ease; but that ease is deceptive, for it has been acquired by painful effort (124–5).

All the metaphors are illuminating, whether political, economic, or artistic. But the most suggestive is that of the horticulturalist; for it brings out most clearly Horace's view that poetry is a raw force of nature which has to be disciplined by art. In all the literary epistles art gives rise to fascinating discussion. Nature does not, but it is regularly acknowledged; and those who think they can dispense with it are invariably ridiculed.

After talking of the demands of art Horace adds 'Rather than go through all the effort again I'd sooner be a crazy scribbler delighted at his own work.' This kind of delusion is illustrated by the story of the mad theatre-goer at Argos who applauded non-existent plays and was justifiably annoyed when his friends had him cured.

'Anyhow, I ought to be concentrating on philosophy instead of wasting my time on frivolities' (141–216). This is the final, and most fully elaborated, excuse; and it represents Horace putting his intentions into practice. The section begins with *sapere*, which appears at first to carry on the idea of sanity, but then turns out to have an ethical meaning. The *ludus* to be abandoned (142) is that of writing lyric; and the *modi* to be mastered are those of morality rather than poetry. The precepts start with a medical analogy: dropsy isn't cured by drinking, nor greed by making money (145–57). Then, passing to law, Horace dwells on the futility of purchasing property: '*usus* (in the legal sense) gives a kind of ownership as distinct from purchase. And

[13] Cf. Cato, *De agr.* 44 (olives) 'make the stems smooth'; Columella, *RR* 4.10.2 (vines) 'the vine should be trimmed ... the smooth, straight vine without a scar is the best'.

use (in the ordinary sense) is just as good as purchase. Even purchase itself is never more than temporary; so what good are large estates? Everything in the end is reaped by Death, who cannot be bribed by gold' (158–79). The terms of the argument are taken from Roman law: *proprium*, *mancipare*, *usus* etc.; but Horace as a layman avoids the manner of a technical expert ('if one is to believe the lawyers' in 159). Also, instead of speaking of litigation in city courts, he takes us into the countryside. We hear of corn, grapes, and chickens; a kettle boiling on a log fire in the chilly evening; a line of poplar trees. As in Gray's *Elegy*, the antiquity of the scene leads us back over earlier generations; and from that we move easily to thoughts of transience.

'People differ in temperament. One man spends his days energetically making money, while his brother is a pleasure-loving idler. I myself aim at the mean' (180–204). The transition is smoothed over by ending the previous section with 'gold' and beginning this one with 'jewels, marble, ivory etc.'. Horace's claim to moderation is then taken up in the final section (205–16). 'You say you aren't a miser; well, have you got rid of other vices too – ambition, superstition, intolerance? If you can't live properly make way for those who can.' The person addressed here is certainly not young Florus. In a sense it is the reader, for all Horace's epistles have a general application. But the words take on a special sharpness when they are seen as Horace's address to himself (*mecum loquor* in 145). There was, after all, perhaps a hint of complacency in his claim to moderation; and one of Horace's attractions as a moralist is his self-awareness. The closing injunction (*lusisti satis* etc.) has the right ironic flavour for an ageing hedonist.

We have noted how the poem is organised as a series of pleas. This is a characteristically Roman feature. One recalls how Catullus aroused sympathy for Ariadne by allowing her to make an effective case against her lover, as though an unseen jury were sitting on the beach of Naxos. Dido's speeches are no less rhetorical in conception. The present instance is by contrast light-hearted, but the legalistic framework is still apparent. And the forensic ambience does not stop there. For throughout the poem runs a preoccupation with law and property. Thus we have the sale of a slave and its legal implications (1–25); theft and one man's reaction to it (26–40); loss of property and Horace's reaction to it (50–4); the thefts perpetrated by the years (55–7); the Roman jurist and his admirer (87–9); the *legitimum poema*

and the censor (109–19); the theft of illusions (139–40); property and conveyancing (158–79); opposite attitudes to property (180–9); inheritance (191–2); extreme and unwise uses of property (192–9). It is no accident that the most gravely impressive lines in the poem – lines with an unmistakably Lucretian resonance – comment on the transience of ownership (171–9).

Though not a 'literary epistle' in the same central sense as *E.* 2.1 and the *AP*, the *Epistle to Florus* is a delightful piece of work. One can understand why the Emperor felt a certain pique at not receiving anything similar; and it is not surprising that its wit and wisdom should have stimulated Pope (1688–1744) to produce one of his most successful and inventive *Imitations*.[14] The times were propitious. The social structure of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century; the relation of the capital to the countryside; the desire for country houses; the respect for order and clarity in literature, religion, and social behaviour; the confidence that contemporary standards were superior to anything that had gone before – these and many other factors combined to produce an English 'Augustan age'.[15]

In the middle of that period a poet emerged who, unlike Horace, knew little of school, university, or court life, and nothing of war (for he was cruelly disabled). Nevertheless, the common pattern of attentive father, classical education, civil war, defeat, eviction, poverty, and eventual literary success gave Pope a natural sense of affinity with his Roman predecessor, to such an extent that he turned his house at Twickenham (then a village outside London) into an English equivalent of the Sabine farm.

In writing *The Second Epistle of the Second Book of Horace*, Pope had not only to follow the situation and argument of the original but also to achieve a comparable range of tone. This could only be done by listening carefully to the text. But he did not feel confined to the text. He was willing to use the Latin as a point of departure, drawing by free association on lines from the *Satires*, *Odes*, and *Ars Poetica*, moving backwards to Lucretius and forwards to Juvenal, incorporating ideas from Bentley's text or the Delphin's paraphrase. At the same time

[14] For a comparative analysis see Rudd.

[15] See, e.g., *The Pelican guide to English literature* IV, pts. 1 and 2, and also the bibliography.

he had to build a new artefact, capable of standing on its own feet: an English, eighteenth-century, Christian poem, inhabited by real people. The result was simultaneously an independent creation and an extended literary allusion, advertising its debt not only by its title but also by having the Latin text printed *en face*. As Pope's *Imitations of Horace* appeared, it became clear that he had raised creative imitation to a new height – a height to be equalled only by Johnson's 'London' and 'The Vanity of Human Wishes'. Today his imitation of *Epistles* 2.2 continues to offer a highly illuminating critique of the *Epistle to Florus*.

3. THE EPISTLE TO THE PISONES ('*ARS POETICA*')

Title

Originally the work may have been called *Epistula ad Pisones*; certainly its status as an epistle is implied by the grammarian Charisius (fourth century A.D.) who cites the work by the phrase *Horatius in Epistularum*.[16] But Quintilian (first century A.D.) referred to it as the *ars poetica* (Pref. to Trypho, 2) and as the *liber de arte poetica* (8.3.60), and the first of these two titles has stuck. In the manuscript tradition the *Ars Poetica* does not follow *E.* 2.1 and 2.2, but appears second after the *Odes*, or fourth after the *Odes*, *Epodes*, and *Carmen Saeculare*. So it seems never to have formed part of the second book of *Epistles*; we cannot even be sure that it was published by Horace himself.

Date

This is controversial. The most likely hypothesis is that Horace addressed the *Ars Poetica* to Lucius Calpurnius Piso (the Pontifex) and his sons in about 10 B.C., not long after the father had returned from his campaigns in Thrace.[17] This is in line with what Porphyrio says in his note on the opening lines: *hunc librum, qui inscribitur de arte poetica, ad*

[16] Charisius, ed. K. Barwick (Teubner), p. 263.9; 265.1.

[17] The best exposition of this view is by Dilke.